Fertilizer Recommendations: Soil Test to Application

Kelly Morgan
conserve@ufl.edu
239 658 3400
Introduction

✓ Florida soils have poor water & nutrient retention and are prone to nutrient leaching and/or run-off

✓ Fertilizer recommendations provide general guidelines based on plant growth

✓ Improved nutrient plans including soil and tissue sampling matching nutrient supply to soil will improve growth and reduce the risk of potential N leaching on Florida sandy soils

✓ No Nutrient you Manage should be Limiting so that the right amount of each nutrient is available when needed
Florida Watershed Restoration Act

✓ Authorizes FDACS to develop water quality and water quantity BMPs to address agricultural nonpoint sources to meet Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLS) and otherwise protect water quality.

✓ Implementation of FDACS BMPs, according to rule, provides “presumption of compliance” with state water quality standards for the pollutants addressed by the BMPs.
Nonpoint source pollution comes from diffuse sources. It is carried primarily by rainfall and irrigation water, which causes accumulated pollutants to either run off into surface waters or leach into ground water.
Basin Management Action Plans (BMAP)

- Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Establishes Basin Management Action Plans (BMAP)
- The "blueprint" for restoring impaired waters by reducing pollutant loadings to meet the allowable loadings established in a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL).
- Represents a comprehensive set of strategies--permit limits on wastewater facilities, urban and agriculture
Current BMAPs
**Implementation of State-wide BMP Program**

**Programs**
- 25 Basin Management Action Plan (BMAPs) areas
- BMAPs developed by FDEP
  - Total maximum daily loads (TMDL)
  - All water users not only agriculture
- BMP developed by FDACS-Office of Ag Water Policy

**Consequences**
- Less voluntary than in past
- Land owners required to sign notice of intent (NOI)
- Presumption of Compliance
- Implementation Assurance program under development
- Mandatory water quality samples may be required by FDEP
Best Management Practices (BMPs)

- Participation in FDACS BMP programs is agriculture’s method of compliance
- BMPs are science based practices that will reduce environmental impact
- Practices include: nutrient management, irrigation scheduling, and water resource protection
- Financial assistance is offered by FDACS, water management districts and USDA - designed to implement the pollutant reductions established by the TMDL.
Improving Nutrient Use Efficiency

BMP = Efficient use of Water and Nutrients

Efficient water and nutrient use will:
✓ Maintain adequate water and soil nutrient levels to maximize plant growth and health
✓ Increase growth
✓ Decrease production cost and resource depletion: facilitates sustainable production
✓ Reduce nutrient losses and environmental impacts
Statewide Participation

4.6 million acres enrolled in BMPs statewide

- Cow/Calf 2.8 million acres
- Row Crops 1.04 million acres
- Citrus 578,812 acres
- Mixed Use 102,733 acres
- Dairies 56,710 acres
- Sod Farms 38,006 acres
- Nursery 30,539 acres
- Fruit/Nut 7,116 acres
- Equine 1,653 acres
Emphasis for BMP Extension

- Increased emphasis on soil and tissue testing in nutrient recommendations
- Improved irrigation management scheduling
- Development of smart phone and tablet apps on irrigation and nutrient recommendations and fertilizer management calculations
- Development of improved nutrient documents to support FDACS BMP manuals
FDACS BMP Implementation Assurance (IA)

- Written surveys to get producer feedback on BMP implementation –
  - Helps evaluate effectiveness of programs/identify producer needs
- Site visits conducted, to verify implementation
  - To review key BMPs, discuss questions, provide technical assistance
  - Implementation assurance is currently progressing through rule making
BMP Record Keeping

- Record keeping, as specified in FDACS rules and BMP manuals are required.
- BMP records must be accurate, clear, and well-organized.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fertilization/Nutrient Records (Retain all Lab Results)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<th>Irrigation Maintenance</th>
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<td>Date</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rainfall (in.)</th>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Well Records</th>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
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Agriculture’s Role in Water Quality Protection

The Legislature provided for agricultural operations to implement BMPs as the preferred means to help meet TMDLs and otherwise protect water quality.

Agricultural operations within BMAP areas have two options*

- Enroll in and implement FDACS BMPs

  Or

- Follow an FDEP- or WMD-prescribed water quality monitoring plan at the producer’s own expense (complicated and costly)

* Failure to do either could bring enforcement action by FDEP or the applicable WMD
### Estimated Costs of Groundwater Sampling and Analysis Required by FDEP if not Implementing BMPs in a BMAP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Cost Range</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring Plan Development</td>
<td>Initial Monitoring site selection report for surface water and/or groundwater. PG or PE required</td>
<td>$25,000 to $45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well Installation</td>
<td>Groundwater Monitoring Well installation 25 feet deep or less</td>
<td>$1,500 per well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well Installation</td>
<td>Groundwater Monitoring Well installation 70 feet deep or less</td>
<td>$6,000 per well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface Water Monitoring Station</td>
<td>Installation/calibration of station</td>
<td>$10,000 per station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling Wells</td>
<td>Monitoring Well Sampling Dependent on depth of well</td>
<td>$400 to $600 per well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling Wells</td>
<td>Groundwater analytical costs</td>
<td>$400 to $800 per sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling Report</td>
<td>Water quality monitoring report</td>
<td>$1,500 to $3,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BMP considerations for nutrient and water management

- **Use of UF/IFAS recommendations:**
  Nitrogen rate & timing for the growth of young non-bearing trees depending on soil type, fertilizer source and placement, crop load, crop variety, and irrigation method (if applicable)

- **Use of soil analyses information for fertilizer application:**
  Growers can make informed decisions about crop fertilization requirements.
BMP considerations for water and nutrient management (2)

✓ Use of tissue analyses for fertilizer application decisions:
  ✓ This helps in assessing nutrition status of crops for macronutrients (e.g. N and K) and micronutrients (e.g. Cu, Mn, Zn, Fe, B)

✓ Training of fertilizer applicators:
  ✓ Adequate training of the field operators in the handling, loading and operating of fertilizer spreaders and accurate calibration of equipment.
BMP considerations for water and nutrient management (3)

- **Fertilizer placement near or over the root zone:**
  - Accurate placement of fertilizer facilitates uptake and reduces nutrient losses through runoff and leaching.

- **Avoiding fertilization during high water table or flooded conditions:**
  - Applying nutrients during wet conditions leads to leaching and lateral flow of nutrients, thus increasing costs of production and posing environmental concerns to surface and groundwater.
BMP considerations for water and nutrient management (4)

✓ Split fertilizer applications:
  ✓ Split fertilizer applications can reduce leaching losses particularly for N and K during excessive rainfall events.

✓ Use of fertigation practices:
  ✓ Helps in precise control of nutrient placement in concert with irrigation for optimal water and nutrient uptake.
4 R Crop Nutrient App

Right Rate

Rate Source

Right Time/Method

UF IFAS Extension

BMPs Florida Agriculture
Leaf Nutrient Concentrations
Leaf Nutrient Concentrations

- Leaf nutrient concentrations continuously change.
- As leaves age from spring through fall, N, P, and K concentrations decrease, Ca increases, and Mg first increases and then decreases.
- Leaf mineral concentrations are relatively stable from 4 to 6 months after emergence in the spring.
Soil pH
Alkalinity

✓ Primarily determined by presence of bicarbonates (HCO$_3^-$), Carbonates (CO$_3^{2-}$), and hydroxides (OH$^-$) in water.

✓ A measure of the capacity of water to neutralize acids.

✓ Alkaline compounds in water remove H$^+$ ions and lower the acidity of water (increase pH).

✓ Limits nutrient availability in soils
Bicarbonates in Water

- Water above pH 7.5 is usually associated with high bicarbonates.
- Recommend levels of 100 ppm or less.
- Forms bicarbonate salts with Ca, Mg, Na, and K.
- High Ca concentrations will react to form Calcium carbonate or line.
- Higher calcium carbonate in soils increases pH making many nutrients less available.
- Particulates can drop out of water and plug emitters or microsprinklers.
- Soils with excess Ca forms CaCO₃ (lime).
- Treatments:
  - calcium or gypsum (calcium sulfate) to increase calcium availability to plants and soil,
  - elemental sulfur can be used to reduce soil pH,
  - applications of acidified water or acidic fertilizer.
Plant Uptake

- Bicarbonate induced chlorosis is caused by transport of bicarbonate into the plant leading to reduced nutrient uptake.
- Lime-induced chlorosis effects many annual crops and perennial plants growing on calcareous soils.

Water Treatment

- Standard treatment is to lower the water’s pH by adding an acid. Lowering the pH to 6.5 neutralizes about half the bicarbonate in the water.
- Injection of acidified water instead of a dry material to a wide area will reduce bicarbonate accumulation in the irrigated area where irrigation may cause to accumulation.
- Most common acids to inject are sulfuric acid, phosphoric acid.
Acidification of the soil and water reduces pH, increase nutrient uptake

Water conditioning, **Faster, lower soil bicarbonate**

Injection of N-furic acid or sulfuric acid (40%) to adjust irrigation water to pH 6.5

Soil conditioning, **Slower, high soil bicarbonate**

300 lbs/treated acre of Tiger 90 sulfur lowered soil pH in 9 months
Valencia/Swingle - 10 yr old

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sulfur</th>
<th>pH</th>
<th>Root density (mg/cm³)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5.9*</td>
<td>1.4*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant difference P < 0.05
Acidifying Fertilizers

- **Alternative Acidifying methods**
  - Formulations with acidifying materials
    - When ammonium is converted into nitrate in the soil $3H^+$ are released increasing soil pH
    - Ammonium thiosulfate is also acidifying because it supplies both ammonium and sulfur
  - Replace any filler with slow release forms of sulfur (e.g. Tiger 90)
Soil Testing and Nutrient Recommendations
Soil Analysis or Plant Tissue Analysis

- Soil Analysis typically used to determine application needs prior to planting
  - Extractable vs. available
  - Deficiencies, toxicities and imbalances
- Plant analysis typically used during the season to determine if proper amount of nutrient are available “potential uptake conditions”
Soil Sampling Method

- Take sample cores to a 15 cm depth
- One sample per management unit
- Minimum of 20-30 cores per 15 hectares
- Composite samples by management unit
- Random patterns across field avoiding edges
Soil Test Results

- Soil test results are extractable nutrients
- An index of available nutrients
- Not a measure of plant-available nutrients
- Not be used to calculate available nutrients

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soil Test Index</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Low</td>
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</table>

Fertilizer response expected | No response expected

The probability of response to added fertilizer decreases as Soil Test Index increases.
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Soil Nutrients Recommendations Using Mehlich-3

- Changed from Mehlich 1 to Mehlich 3 in 2014
- Most Florida soils have increased in pH
- Mehlich 3 best extractant to provide fertilizer recommendations

Table 1. Comparison of Mehlich-1 and Mehlich-3 soil extractants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mehlich-1</th>
<th>Mehlich-3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid pH Range</td>
<td>pH &lt; 6.5</td>
<td>Most normal soil pH ranges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraction of P</td>
<td>Limited in soils</td>
<td>Fluoride facilitates dissociation of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with high Fe and</td>
<td>phosphates from Fe and Al oxides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Al accumulations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraction of Micronutrients</td>
<td>Dilute acid mixture, only some micronutrients extracted</td>
<td>EDTA (chelate) extracts micronutrients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchangeable Cations</td>
<td>Poor extractant for high CEC soils</td>
<td>Ammonium nitrate extracts exchangeable cations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparing Soil Test Results for Mehlich 1 and Mehlich 3
# Current Mehlich 3 Soil Test Interpretation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutrient</th>
<th>LOW</th>
<th>MEDIUM</th>
<th>HIGH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>≤25</td>
<td>26–45</td>
<td>&gt;45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>≤35</td>
<td>36–60</td>
<td>&gt;60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mg</td>
<td>≤20</td>
<td>21–40</td>
<td>&gt;40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Availability

- P increasingly available with increased pH
- P increasingly not available above pH 7.0 in high Ca soils
- P most available in the pH range of 5.5 to 6.5
- P soil tests suggest that P can accumulate and remain available for years
Placement Determines N Form

Queensland Australia
Clay soil
Fertilizer placement impacts the amount of N loss
Fertilizer source impacts the type of N available to the plant
Fertilizer source has a direct impact on the duration that an N type is available

Source: Prasertsak et al. 2002. Effect of fertilizer placement on N loss from sugarcane in Tropical Queensland
Nitrogen Transformation

- Ammonium applied to the surface decreases quickly by volatilization
- Conversion of Ammonium to nitrate begins less than 8 days, complete in 20 days
Effect of Soil pH

- Cumulative volatilization with time is dependent on soil pH
- Minimum volatilization below pH 5

Soil Characteristics and P

Soil affects on P fixation

- Clay soils “fix” P in clay layers
- Organic matter “fixes” P on exchange sites
- Sand holds very little P
- P precipitates out as Ca compounds in calcareous soils

Phosphorus fertilizer affects:

- Fruit yield
- Juice quality
- vegetative growth
- much less dramatically than N or K
Soil Phosphorus

- Reduced Availability (pH = 7.0 to 8.3)
- “Fixed” by soil calcium
- Available to plant for short period of time
- Accumulates over time in-soluble forms

Soil test measures “extractable” P and not “total” P
- “Extractable” P may contain P not available to the plant
Available P mostly water and some bicarbonate extractable
Increasingly less soluble (less available) with increase as you move up Bar
Indication of reduced concentration of dilute acid and water extractable P with time
The 5th R, Right Irrigation

Water is the carrier for nearly all pollutants. Managing irrigation inputs and drainage to keep moisture and fertilizer primarily in the root zone will reduce nutrient-related impacts. Irrigating in excess of the soil’s water-holding capacity or excessive drainage will lead to increased runoff or leaching, and may lead to higher production costs or lower marketable yields.
BMP considerations for water and nutrient management (5)

✓ **Soil moisture based irrigation scheduling:**
  ✓ Use of TDR, tensiometers and other soil moisture measurement devices. This can reduce nutrient leaching beyond the root zone.

✓ **ET-based irrigation scheduling:**
  ✓ Use of weather data to decide when and how much to irrigate. FAWN and other weather data help in using the soil water budget for irrigation.
Smart Phone Apps

My Florida Farm Weather
✓ Display similar to website
✓ Interactive temperature recording
✓ SmartIrrigation
✓ Supported by Multi-state NIFA proposals
✓ Released –
  ✓ citrus, Turf, strawberry, cotton, vegetable, avocado, peanut
✓ Under Development –
  ✓ Blueberry
Take home messages

- Good nutrient and water management improve biomass accumulation, canopy development, and yield.
- N accumulation greater than current recommendations.
- BMPs critical for reducing nutrient loads, irrigation water volumes and production costs.
- Ground water sampling may be required by FDEP within BMAPs if not enrolled in BMP program.
Thank You!

Dr. Kelly T. Morgan
Soil and Water Sciences
Southwest Florida Research and Education Center
Immokalee, FL 34142
263 658 3400